

**STATEMENT  
OF  
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**BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
108<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS**

**ON  
TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

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HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, ranking member Evans and distinguished members of this Subcommittee. I am honored to appear before you today and have the opportunity to express my gratitude for the considerable efforts the members of Congress have put forth to enhance the military Transition Assistance Program.

I speak from personal experience on the rigors of the transition from military to civilian life. After hearing colleagues rave about the Bolling Air Force Base Transition Assistance Program seminars for two years, I decided to enroll and get a first-hand experience. Many who had taken the course voiced the importance of taking it up to two years prior to retirement. The reason was simple; the program provided not just information, but a plan of action complete with tools and personalized follow up assistance every step of the way for departing service members. What an amazing program!

In the Air Force, we believe that “service before self” is an intrinsic core value. Men and women in uniform spend their time in military service putting their country and military mission first. It is truly difficult to shift gears and concentrate on yourself, especially when you have devoted over twenty-one years to active duty in our nation’s military. For those like me who have remained in one specialty career field the entire time, the idea of finding gainful employment in the civilian sector can be daunting. A changing economy coupled with a highly competitive job market serve to further emphasize the need to be prepared. As a military professional and member of a generation accustomed to the concept of working for the same employer for many years, I must adjust my

mindset. To complicate the matter further, I am at an age where I must consider not only post-military employment, but also the best options for supporting my precocious six-year old son, two beautiful step-daughters, one still in college, my spouse with medical problems and elderly parents with rapidly declining health and resources.

The beauty of the Transition Assistance Program is that it reaches out to everyone, regardless of circumstances. Whether they were unexpectedly medically retired or separated, decided not to reenlist, or just reached their retirement time, each person is offered the opportunity to explore career options at no cost to them. Rare are the businesses that invest in transition programs that offer skills assessments, resume writing, interviewing strategies and job search assistance to those who are leaving the company. I believe participation in TAP seminars will lessen the likelihood of jobless veterans living on our nation's streets. Perhaps the most powerful endorsement for TAP travels by word of mouth from those like me who have directly benefited from the seminar. The military is a leader of transitional employment assistance, thanks in great part to the vision and vigilance of the members of this Subcommittee.

My work in transitioning to the civilian sector has just begun. I have barely scratched the surface of the vast resources the Departments of Defense, Labor and Veterans Affairs have afforded me. But the Transition Assistance Program charged us full speed ahead into the psychology of switching careers, complete with charts and exercises to bring focus to a myriad of choices. It gave us tools to help manage change and promote ourselves.

The interactive, participative atmosphere of the seminar was outstanding and we gained much insight through the experiences of others. Interestingly, the people I presented my practice sales pitch to included cutting edge space, intelligence and IT managers who said they'd like to work for me. The boost of confidence the exercises gave me was strong enough to propel me forward and to explore job possibilities outside my areas of expertise.

Two areas of particular interest to me were the information packed Veteran Affairs benefit briefing and the in depth and demystifying explanation of the post-retirement TRICARE medical system.

The Veteran Affairs briefing opened our eyes to the Rehabilitation and Employment Assistance Program (REAP), which includes a comprehensive three-day small group counseling program at no cost to the service member, the Executive Transitional Career Counseling program, as well as the Vocational Educational Counseling program. I have discovered that the Vocational Educational Counseling (VEC) program best fits my needs at this time and I'm in the exploration phase and this free, one-on-one counseling.

I had no idea of the scope of the transitional services available at no cost, and have encouraged separating members to take full advantage of these terrific Department of Veterans Affairs packages. Without the Transition Assistance Program, I would not have learned about these excellent programs.

Perhaps the most valuable tools presented dealt with a systematic method to organize my job search. The career catalog and source document require serious reflection and commitment. The source document is a compilation of

everything you earned money doing plus non-paid community, church and charity work, even as a child. Volunteer opportunities show accomplishments, education and training not usually found in paid positions. Before this seminar I would not have thought to include such community service in my resume material.

Although I've spent most of my life on a stage, the idea of marketing myself terrifies me. I can sell the merits of others, but when it comes down to packaging me, I cringe. The innovative approach and suggestions in the marketing plan material provided tangible ways to get me started. I'm less intimidated by Internet job search protocol and have a better idea of what recruiters are looking for on resumes.

My absolute favorite portion of the seminar was a panel discussion and networking session with various civilian sector corporate representatives. Four had military service experience and had successfully transitioned to the private sector. They described their personal experiences to us to include the various aspects of career change and job searching. We were able to meet one on one with these individuals to ask pointed questions in a totally safe environment. This unique approach allowed us to get a better feel for the kinds of challenges ahead in adapting to the culture of agencies within the public and private sectors.

They impressed upon us the importance of not selling ourselves short. The military has provided a wealth of supervisory, project management and oversight training that is sought after in the civilian sector. These corporate representatives spoke of current trends, the importance of setting our sights on a

genuine second career, as well as benefits package negotiation techniques. My spirits were bolstered at the end of that busy day and I realized that yes, there is life after the military.

One full day was spent on resumes, cover letters and interviewing techniques. We were led through the maze of interview models and provided understanding on ways to ask and answer questions based on years of experience in human resource management. The insights on deportment at tricky interviews included tips on how to read body language, how to handle a panel forum and how to sell your benefits. We were given seven full pages of questions to research and ask at the interview. These are very valuable tools for our job search repertoire. How many military members over the course of their career have had to interview for job? Very few. This information is invaluable!

We also received clear legal guidance on the establishment of a domicile, safeguarding the DD 214 retirement form, documenting disabilities, household good shipment claims, post-Government employment rules and restrictions, ethics answers regarding use of government property and e-mail during the job search, the Procurement Integrity Act, permissive TDY, Civil Service and Non-Appropriated Fund jobs, how we may gain permission to work a new job while on terminal leave, how to obtain permission to work for a foreign government and rules regarding retirement gifts.

Another day pieced together the government benefits puzzle. When it was finished, I felt better versed in how the components of the Survivors Benefit Plan, Social Security and Veterans Administration compensation work to provide

an integrated benefits package. We wrapped up that day with salary negotiation strategies and were given the steps to follow to analyze our current financial status, how to research our worth based on supply/demand, geographic area, sector, industry, company, job and level of experience, and how to mentally prepare for the negotiation. We were armed with several pages of potential interviewee answers and questions as well as the usual employer objections. We were even provided some basic rules of negotiation. I believe that this segment will serve me well when I begin the interview process.

By the end of each day my head was spinning and I realized that I have a great deal of legwork to do to prepare for my transition. But I also felt reassured that experts were available to guide me every step of the way. I took copious notes and still couldn't write quickly enough. Fortunately, all of the briefings were included in the 11<sup>th</sup> Wing TAP resource book, with plenty of room to add information.

At the end of the five-day Transition Assistance Program seminar, my colleagues and I agreed that everyone involved provided an incredible service to departing members.

Mr. Chairman, it is clear to me that the Air Force has made great strides forward to promote and maximize the participation of every separating service member in the Transition Assistance Program. I am personally enriched as a direct result of TAP. I am heartened by your commitment to this vital empowerment program that provides the groundwork for our veterans to lead productive lives after military service and transition successfully into the civilian

economy. Thank you for the opportunity to share my experiences with you today. I will be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.